



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

November 15, 2005

The Honorable Bill Hardiman, Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on FIA  
Michigan State Senate  
State Capitol  
Lansing, Michigan 48933

The Honorable Rick Shaffer, Chair  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS  
Michigan House of Representatives  
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator Hardiman and Representative Shaffer:

Section 672 of 2004 Public Act 344 (Enrolled House Bill No. 5516) requires the Michigan Department of Human Services (MDHS) to provide a report on Food Assistance Outreach efforts. We have collaborated with Elder Law of Michigan and with the Center for Civil Justice on the attached Food Assistance Outreach Plan for Michigan. The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service provided federal matching funds to enhance the state funding for these outreach services. We plan to continue this collaboration during FY2006.

If you have any questions, please contact John Sorbet, Chief Administrative Officer, at 373-7787.

Sincerely,

Marianne Udow

cc: Senate and House Appropriations Committees  
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies  
Senate and House Policy Offices  
State Budget Director

## **Food Stamp Outreach Plan Updated February 2005**

### **I. Description of Organizations and Projects Involved in Michigan Food Stamp Outreach Plan**

#### **A. Center for Civil Justice**

The Center for Civil Justice is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides information and advocacy services to low income persons. For over 8 years, CCJ has been very involved in hunger advocacy and Food Stamp outreach, including preparation and distribution of outreach materials, training, eligibility screening, and brief services for Food Stamp applicants and recipients. CCJ piloted a Food Stamp Helpline in 6 counties as part of a USDA funded research grant from 2001-2003. Following the study, CCJ expanded the Helpline services statewide, with partial funding from USDA nutrition education funds that CCJ received in a subcontract from Michigan State University Extension. CCJ uses private funds as match. In 2004-05, the Helpline will also offer nutrition education services in collaboration with Michigan State University Extension. The Helpline staff can provide services in English and Spanish, and additional languages can be arranged through a telephone interpreter service.

Key Contacts: Terri L. Stangl, Executive Director  
Mary Vizcarra, Helpline Coordinator

#### **B. Elder Law / Michigan Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCAFE)**

Elder Law of Michigan, Inc. (ELM), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was established in 1990. The mission of ELM is to promote and protect the rights of Michigan seniors by providing information, advocacy and legal advice. A key focus of all of our programs is increasing access to aging services through the use of technology with a human touch. Our signature programs are: The Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors, the Michigan Pension Rights Project, and the Michigan Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCAFE) Program.

MiCAFE began as a USDA-funded demonstration project in 2001 in Genesee County. MiCAFE is staffed by 1 FTE Project Manager and 1.5 FTE Call Center Operators. The project increases the participation of seniors in the Food Assistance Program by making senior centers points of access (rather than requiring seniors to go to a local government office) and utilizing both volunteers and a customized internet-based application process. MiCAFE expanded to serve Kalamazoo, Cass, Branch and St. Joseph Counties in 2004 and is expanding to Gratiot, Kent, and parts of Wayne County in 2005.

Key Contacts: Kate White, Executive Director  
Sarah Cook, Project Manager

### C. Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services is the Food Stamp Agency for Michigan.

Key contacts: Janet Cushman

Don Mussen

## **II. Funding Structure and Source of State Match and Private Match**

This outreach plan has been funded in part with a legislative appropriation of state funds to Elder Law of Michigan for its MiCAFE Program. The legislature has approved \$50,000 for Elder Law. Elder Law has also secured an additional \$41,000 from private foundations that is sought for additional state match. The funds come from the Merkley Charitable Trust \$5,000, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan \$6,000 and \$30,000 from the Ruth Mott Foundation.

The state funds would be used as match for an additional \$50,000 in federal Food Stamp Outreach funds, in an amount equal to the state match. This, in turn, would be provided to the Center for Civil Justice to support the Helpline through a contract. CCJ would use those funds in accordance with this plan and applicable federal accounting rules.

MiCAFE's primary funding for the MiCAFE project was from an Elderly Nutrition Pilot grant from the USDA awarded in 2001. Supplemental funding was provided by the state and private funders from 2002-2004, and \$50,000 is anticipated from the state as part of the current proposed state budget. These funds will be used to cover outreach costs including salary, benefits and printing.

The Food Stamp Helpline is currently funded through a combination of USDA Food and Nutrition Education funds (for which CCJ contributes a match from non-federal funds). In 2004-05, the helpline will offer callers general nutrition and budgeting information, and provide information about Food Stamp Eligibility as a part of this service.

The \$41,000 in private funds would be used to cover some of the costs to expand MiCAFE to Wayne County (which includes Detroit), Kent County (which includes Grand Rapids) and Gratiot County. Federal matching funds would be used to pay for the additional call center staff necessary for expansion in to the new counties, training for local MiCAFE and assistance with local marketing efforts to encourage hard to reach seniors to participate in the food stamp program.

## **III. Staffing**

The state and private match funding would support 2 FTE staff persons for MiCAFE and the federal outreach funds would support 1.2 FTE persons for CCJ.

#### **IV. Service Area for Project**

MiCAFE would provide services in the counties of Genesee, Cass, Branch, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Gratiot, Wayne and Kent. CCJ would provide Food Stamp outreach services statewide as described in this plan.

#### **V. Components of Outreach Plan**

##### **A. Preparation of Outreach Materials**

The Center for Civil Justice will prepare education and outreach materials for statewide distribution. These will include flyers and brochures about the Nutrition and Food Stamp Helpline and Food Stamps generally, as well as brochures or notices about relevant program changes. These will be posted on-line, and made available to non-profit organizations through email, electronic newsletters, and by mail. CCJ will make new materials available in both English and Spanish.

MiCAFE will produce education and outreach materials targeted to senior citizens in the counties served by MiCAFE and advising them of the MiCAFE services. MiCAFE outreach activities include volunteer training, preparation and distribution of outreach materials in English and Spanish at low reading level, advertising through the general media, and operation of a Call Center for general information and application assistance.

Marketing materials include brochures, flyers, posters, postcards, press releases, newspaper advertisements and radio announcements. A special effort will be made to produce the materials at or near a sixth grade reading level for seniors with low literacy. The information will also be posted on ELM's website. We will work with local partners in Genesee County to translate materials in Spanish. The MiCAFE program will produce outreach and education materials as part of their Eat Your Way to Good Health Campaign, a new initiative designed to encourage seniors to maximize nutrition to promote health. Specific information on budgeting and how to maximize food stamp dollars for health will be included.

##### **B. Eligibility Pre-screening**

MiCAFE will provide general eligibility prescreening using the MiCAFE computer system and MiCAFE Call Center to senior citizens who wish to learn more about or apply for Food Stamps. MiCAFE will refer more complicated eligibility screening questions to the Food Stamp Helpline.

The Center for Civil Justice will offer eligibility pre-screening on the telephone to callers from throughout the state. CCJ will inform callers have expressed an interest in applying for Food Stamps whether they appear eligible for such assistance and provide an estimate of the benefits the caller would receive based on the DHS rules and the caller's reported circumstances. CCJ will have Spanish-speaking individuals

on staff and interpreters for other languages available through a telephone interpretation service. CCJ will have voice mail for callers who cannot receive immediate service. CCJ will also update and maintain its on-line eligibility calculator at [www.foodstamphelp.org](http://www.foodstamphelp.org) which provides an accurate estimate of a household's food stamp allotment for routine household situations.

### **C. Distribution of Outreach and Education Materials**

MiCAFE will provide outreach materials produced by MiCAFE, USDA, and CCJ as appropriate to all MiCAFE sites in their service area, which includes senior centers, senior apartment complexes, churches, community centers, and ethnic service organizations. MiCAFE will encourage and facilitate the delivery of this information to other aging service providers in the counties that it serves, such as health professionals, chore and personal care providers, etc. MiCAFE will provide materials that can easily be replicated or produced in bulk for county contacts, seek media coverage for its services, and work with human services and community organizations in the counties to promote its services. MiCAFE staff will attend senior and health fairs in the target counties to distribute materials and answer questions about food stamps. Finally, MiCAFE will prepare marketing plans detailing a twelve month outreach strategy for new MiCAFE sites, and will work closely with existing sites who express interest in creating detailed marketing plans.

CCJ will distribute the outreach and education materials it produces, together with materials from DHS, USDA, or MiCAFE as appropriate. Some of the ways this will be done include:

- Posting on [www.foodstamphelp.org](http://www.foodstamphelp.org) web site
- Posting on Michigan Law Help web site
- Providing materials to Food Bank Council of Michigan for distribution throughout the state
- Providing materials and links to WIC offices
- Providing brief articles and links to organizations using newsletters, including but not limited to the Michigan Association of United Ways, Food Bank Council of Michigan and regional food banks, Head Start Newsletters, legal services providers, community action agencies, etc.
- Seeking periodic media coverage about Food Stamps, developments in the program, and the Food Stamp Helpline
- Working with the Department of Education to develop ways to advertise the Helpline's services to participants in the School lunch and breakfast programs

DHS will advertise these eligibility pre-screening services on its web sites, through its toll-free Food Stamp information number, and through local DHS offices. DHS will also help CCJ and MiCAFE build relationships with other state agencies that may be able to promote these Food Stamp-related services with their customers.

### **D. Training and Technical Assistance**

MiCAFE will train staff and volunteers at MiCAFE sites in the counties it is serving to complete applications for Food Stamps, to assist with the collection of required

verification, and to do basic eligibility screening of seniors. We will provide ongoing support to volunteers through the MiCAFE Call Center, a toll free number available to answer general questions about the program and assist volunteers with content and technical problems. MiCAFE volunteers will also be trained on the nutrition information related to the Eat Your Way to Good Health Campaign as it related to the Food Stamp Program. Sites will receive training and information on marketing and outreach strategies.

CCJ will make technical assistance available to non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, and hunger advocates through its Food Stamp Helpline. CCJ will also provide training on request to other organizations, with an emphasis on statewide or multi-county groups.

#### **E. Brief Services to Persons Applying for Food Stamps**

MiCAFE volunteers will help seniors navigate through the application process and assist with verification questions and requirements. Volunteers will ask seniors the necessary application questions and enter the answers in to the computer program. Once all questions are answered, a completed application and verification checklist is generated. Volunteers will help seniors gather the documents that need to be verified and will make copies of the available documents. The completed package (application and verifications) will be mailed by the volunteer for the senior to the local DHS agency. The volunteer will work with the senior to gather additional verifications requested/required by DHS. Complex questions about eligibility or Food Stamp policy will be referred to the Food Stamp Helpline. MiCAFE will also provide seniors with nutrition information and referrals to other nutrition programs such as congregate meals and home delivered meals.

CCJ will research policy questions for callers, provide information on how Food Stamp rules and procedures will apply to particular applicants and recipients, and make appropriate referrals of callers to advocates or organizations who can assist them further. CCJ will help callers receive the information they need to overcome real or perceived barriers to assistance.